



## Fuel mysterious factor in fatal plane crash

**STUDENT PILOTS: A bank to avoid the ridgeline may have clipped the wing, a searcher says.**

11:19 PM PST on Wednesday, March 2, 2005

By RICHARD BROOKS / The Press-Enterprise

The pilots of a Redlands-based airplane apparently made an unsuccessful attempt to turn away from the ridgeline near Yucaipa where they crashed and died moments later, a searcher said Wednesday.

"I guess it was (flying) up-canyon," said San Bernardino County Deputy Sheriff Shannon Kovich, who helped recover the three bodies after the crash that is believed to have happened Monday night. "They couldn't clear the ridge, so they tried banking real hard to the left."

The single-engine Piper's left wing may have hit the ground, causing it to swing around and end up facing down-canyon, said Kovich, who based his comments on the damage to the plane and an examination of the surrounding terrain.

The Piper didn't burn, which sometimes indicates a plane ran out of fuel. But there are indications that the plane may not have crashed with empty gas tanks.

"I could smell the aviation fuel. It was real strong," Kovich recalled. "I don't know why there was no fire."

Killed in the crash were an instructor pilot and two men from Japan who were practicing to be commercial pilots.

Coroner's officials Wednesday identified the dead as Yushi Miyahara, 24, of Tos-Shi, Saga, Japan, and Masayuki Diato, 30, from Yokohama-shi Kanagawa in Japan.

The name of their 36-year-old flight instructor, who is from Half Moon Bay in Central California, was withheld pending notification of relatives.

The plane took off about 6:30 p.m. Monday from Redlands Municipal Airport on what was planned to be a 90-minute flight to practice takeoffs and landings at Redlands and at nearby San Bernardino International Airport.

The crash site is 4,000 feet up the south side of Pisgah Peak.

A Yucaipa woman and her daughter spotted the wreckage Tuesday afternoon and summoned sheriff's deputies.

### Fatal crash

Possible cause determined

Two student pilots from Japan identified

Instructor's name is still being withheld

National Transportation Safety Board investigators arrived at the crash site at 8 p.m.

Beginning about 9 p.m., the bodies were removed by 15 members of search-and-rescue teams from Oak Glen, San Geronio and Valley of the Falls.

Four team members rappelled about 150 feet from the ridgeline to the crash site.

The bodies were hoisted by rope to the ridge top, Kovich said, then were carried along a Forest Service road to a coroner's vehicle.

The wreckage appears to be on public land and will be removed, probably by helicopter, said Battalion Chief Doug Lannon, of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

"Because of the bad weather coming in, it's already foggy over there. And with the storm coming in this weekend ... they wait until there's decent weather, because we don't want to put anyone else at risk," Lannon said Wednesday afternoon.

Among the lingering questions is whether the men knew they were flying so close to the mountains.

The pilots apparently were planning to make instrument landing approaches, said Lt. Col. Steve Asche of the Civil Air Patrol.

"In itself, that is not a bad thing," Asche said. "But one thing we're concerned about is that they may have been so concentrated on the instruments in the cockpit that they weren't looking outside."

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